CLAIMS

1. A method of remotely accessing and controlling individually addressable user information receiving terminals comprising the steps of:

generating at each user terminal an identifier that is different from the identifiers at the other user terminals;

transmitting point-to-point from a selected one of the user terminals to a remote site the identifier for the selected user terminal and a request for controlling the selected user terminal;

inserting into a telecast information signal at the remote site the identifier for the selected user terminal and a control signal instructing the selected user terminal to implement the request;

transmitting the telecast signal, including the identifier and the control signal, from the remote site to the user terminals;

extracting the identifier for the selected user terminal and the control signal from the telecast signal at the user terminals; and

controlling the selected user terminal to implement the request responsive to the identifier only at the selected user terminal.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the generating step comprises generating the identifier responsive to conditions at the time of initial operation of the user terminal.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the generating step comprises generating a random number to serve as the identifier.

4. The method of Claim 3, wherein generation of the random number is dependent on actions of the user.

5. The method of Claim 2, wherein the step of generating the identifier responsive to conditions at the time of initial operation of the user terminal comprises:

applying electrical power to the user terminal;

initiating counting on a first counter and a second counter at the user terminal responsive to the application of power;

halting counting on the first counter responsive to receipt of a first user operating command for the user terminal;

halting counting on the second counter responsive to receipt of a second user operating command for the user terminal; and

combining the counts from the first counter and the second counter to form the identifier.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein the user terminal is a video cassette recorder and the request for controlling the user terminal comprises selection criteria for programming the video cassette recorder to record selected programs.

7. The method of Claim 6, wherein the control signal includes channel, date, time-of-day, and program length data signals.

8. The method of Claim 7, wherein the channel, date, time-of-day, and program length data signals are in the form of a compressed code.

9. The method of Claim 1, wherein the remote site is a television transmitter or head end, the signal is a television signal having a vertical blanking interval, and the inserting step comprises inserting the identifier and the control signal into the vertical blanking interval of the television signal.

10. A method for selectively transmitting information contained in a television signal from a central telecast site to a plurality of user terminals having television tuners, the method comprising the steps of:

storing address signals uniquely identifying the user terminals at the respective user terminals;

transmitting the address signals from selected user terminals to the central telecast site;

embedding selected ones of the address signals and the information to be selectively transmitted to the user terminals identified by such address signals in a television signal at the central telecast site;

transmitting the television signal, including the address signals and the information, to the user terminals;

recovering the television signal at all the user terminals;

comparing the stored address signals with the embedded address signals of the recovered television signal at all the user terminals; and

utilizing the information contained in the television signal only at the selected user terminals where there is a match between the respective stored address signals and the embedded address signals.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the information contained in the television signal is data embedded in the television signal.

12. The method of Claim 10, wherein the embedding step embeds the information and the identification signals in a vertical blanking interval line of the television signal.

13. The method of Claim 10, wherein the step of transmitting the identification signals to the central telecast site comprises transmitting the identification signals over a telephone line.

14. The method of Claim 10, wherein the user terminals are video cassette recorders.

15. The method of Claim 14, wherein the information comprises commands for programming a video cassette recorder and the utilizing step comprises programming the video cassette recorder to record a program.

16. The method of Claim 15, wherein the commands include channel, date, time-of-day, and program length data.

17. The method of Claim 16, wherein the commands include a compressed code representing the channel, data, time-of-day, and program length data.

18. The method of Claim 28, wherein the generating step comprises the steps of:

initiating counting operations on a first counter and a second counter at a user terminal;

halting counting operations on the first counter upon receipt of a first user command;

halting counting operations on the second counter upon receipt of a second user command; and

combining the states of the first counter and the second counter to form the random number representing the identification signal for the user terminal.

19. The method of Claim 18, wherein the user terminal is a video cassette recorder and the first and second user requests are commands from a remote controller to the video cassette recorder.

20. A method of selectively receiving information contained in a television signal telecast from a central site at an individually addressable user terminal having a television tuner comprising at the user terminal the steps of:

generating an address that uniquely identifies the user terminal;

storing the unique address;

transmitting the unique address to the central site;

receiving a television signal containing information and a user terminal address from the central site;

comparing the stored address to the address contained in the television signal; and

utilizing the information contained in the television signal if the addresses match.

21. The method of Claim 20, wherein the generating step comprises the step of automatically generating a random number for the user terminal address.

22. The method of Claim 20, wherein the generating step generates the random number based on the actions of the user in operating the user terminal.

23. The method of Claim 22, wherein the generating step comprises the steps of:

initiating counting operations on a first counter and a second counter of the user terminal;

halting counting operations on the first counter responsive to a first command to the user terminal;

halting counting operations on the second counter responsive to a second command to the user terminal; and

combining the states of the first counter and the second counter to form the random number.

24. The method of Claim 23, wherein the user terminal is a videocassette recorder and the information comprises commands for programming the video cassette recorder to record a selected television program.

25. The method of claim 1, additionally comprising the step of displaying the generated identifier at the selected user terminal to communicate such identifier to a user, the transmitting step comprising calling the remote site, communicating the displayed identifier to the remote site, selecting a request from a number of choices, and communicating the request to the remote site.

26. The method of claim 18,wherein the initiating step initiates counting operations upon power up of the user terminal.

27. The method of claim 10, additionally comprising the step of generating the unique addresses at the respective user terminals.

28. The method of claim 27, in which the generating step generates the unique addresses based on actions of users of the user terminals.